



# what's up?

## What's it all about?

During the past 100 years, the average age of puberty dropped from 17 to 13 years old. Consequently, today's teens have the sexually mature bodies and sexual feelings of adults before they are emotionally and intellectually ready for sexual intercourse.

## What are the details?

- Most very young teens have not had intercourse. 8 in 10 girls and 7 in 10 boys are sexually inexperienced at age 15.
- Though the likelihood of teens having intercourse increases steadily with age, about 1 in 5 young people do not have intercourse while teenagers.
- The younger a woman is when she first has sexual intercourse, the more likely it is to have been unwanted or involuntary. About 4 in 10 women who first had intercourse at age 13 or 14 say it was unwanted or involuntary.
- Nearly two-thirds of sexually active 15–17-year-old women have partners who are within 2 years of their age; 29% have sexual partners who are 3–5 years older and 7% have partners who are 6 or more years older. Most sexually active young men have female partners close to their age.

## teenage sexual behavior

### INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

#### Why does it matter?

- **Peers are important to teens.** As they grow, teens look to their friends for advice, support and a sense of belonging—a sense they once got from home.
- **Teens believe myths.** Two of the big myths are that “everyone is having sex,” and “using birth control is bad or at least unromantic.” So to fit in, teens may have sex or not use birth control.
- **The “double standard.”** For teen girls, much of their status still depends on being attractive and having a boyfriend. Boys’ status is affected by their ability to perform and appear interested in sex.
- **Conflicting messages from adults.** Many adults believe teens should not have sexual intercourse, but this is frequently at odds with the social environment in which teens are growing up. TV, magazines, movies, and music all tell teens that sex is romantic, exciting, risky and a mark of adulthood. Teens are told that sex before marriage is bad or wrong. Yet at the same time, their own parents or other adults they know may be living together without marriage. Some adults avoid talking to their children about sexual information, including contraception, for fear it will encourage teens’ sexual activity.
- **Teens are at risk for sexually transmitted diseases.** In 1999 more than 5,500 teens in Washington had a reported STD.



## TEENAGE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

### What can I do?

Studies indicate that clear, strong messages from parents are critical. Yet many parents say that talking about sexuality with their teens is one of the hardest things they have faced. Here are some tips to get the ball rolling:

- Show you are accepting and understanding. Try to listen before giving advice. Let teens know they can trust you and come to you, even when they make mistakes.
- Talk to teens on an ongoing basis before problems arise. Start conversations instead of waiting for questions.
- Share your values, beliefs and concerns with your children. They need to know where you stand.
- Before age 14, give teens accurate information about intercourse, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, body parts, feelings and relationships. They need information. Knowledge is not harmful.
- Talk to boys about girls' development and to girls about boys' development. They need to know about both male and female bodies, feelings and responsibilities.
- Encourage teens to express how they are feeling. Be ready to hear opinions you may not agree with.
- Inform teens about sexual abuse just like you would other dangers. This is a safety issue. Let them know that you think it is wrong for people to expect sex in return for attention, favors or compliments.

### Sexuality education . . . does it matter?

No single approach to talking about sex with teens is appropriate for all adolescents in all circumstances and in every community. It is clear, however, that certain things can make an impact.

All teens need sexuality education that teaches them refusal and negotiation skills and gives them up-to-date information about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases before they are sexually active.

In a recent review of evaluated prevention programs, the Institute of Medicine found that "sexuality education programs that provide information on both abstinence and contraceptive use neither encourage the onset of sexual intercourse nor increase the frequency of intercourse among adolescents...programs that provide both messages appear effective in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse and encouraging contraceptive use once sexual activity has begun, especially among younger adolescents."

**hot  
links!**

"Talking with Teens About Sex" Washington State Department of Health fact sheet  
[www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/teen\\_sex.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/teen_sex.htm)

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States [www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)

Facts In Brief: Teen Sex and Pregnancy The Alan Guttmacher Institute  
[www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb\\_teen\\_sex.html](http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html)

Washington State Youth Risk Behavior Survey 1999 published August 2000 by the Washington State Department of Health, [www.doh.wa.gov/publicat/publications.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/publicat/publications.htm)

Teen Health and the Media [www.teenhealthandthemedias.net](http://www.teenhealthandthemedias.net)

Washington State Department of Health  
DOH Pub 910-115 11/2000

For persons with disabilities, this document  
is available on request in other formats.  
Please call 1-800-525-0127.



**Dear Colleague,**

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is pleased to provide camera-ready art for printing this educational material. To ensure that the original quality of the piece is maintained, please read and follow the instructions below and the specifications included for professional printing.

- **Use the latest version.** DOH materials are developed using the most current information available, are checked for clinical accuracy, and are field tested with the intended audience to ensure they are clear and readable. DOH programs make periodic revisions to educational materials, so please check this web site to be sure you have the latest version. DOH assumes no responsibility for the use of this material or for any errors or omissions.
- **Do not alter.** We are providing this artwork with the understanding that it will be printed without alterations and copies will be free to the public. Do not edit the text or use illustrations or photographs for other purposes without first contacting us. Please do not alter or remove the DOH logo, publication number or revision date. If you want to use a part of this publication for other purposes, contact the Office of Health Promotion first.
- **For quality reproduction:** Low resolution PDF files are intended for black and white or color desktop printers. They work best if you are making only one or two copies. High resolution PDF files are intended for reproducing large quantities and are set up for use by professional offset print shops. The high resolution files also include detailed printing specifications. Please match them as closely as possible and insist on the best possible quality for all reproductions.

If you have questions, contact:

Office of Health Promotion

P.O. Box 47833 Olympia, WA 98504-7833

(360) 236-3736

**Sincerely,**

**Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team**

# P R I N T I N G   S P E C I F I C A T I O N S

**Title:**    **What's Up? Information for Adults Who Care about Teens  
Fact Sheet Series**

**Size:**    8.5 x 11

**Paper stock:**    80# text white gloss

**Ink color:**    4-color process

**Special instructions:**    2-sided printing with full bleeds.

**DOH Pub #:**    910-115